

CONTRASTS OF TECHNOLOGY AND PUBLIC SUPERVISION IN ISRAEL'S MEDIA POLICY

YARON KATZ

Holon Institute of Technology, Israel

ABSTRACT

The media in Israel are unique in that, they are constrained by many contrasts. Israel is known as a "startup nation", but the role of the government in the media is still superior to all other forces. The media enjoys freedom of speech, but not in all that involves security issues. Broadcasting is privately-operated, but also under strict public supervision and all channels is obligated to transmit local production. The research examines changes in media policy in Israel – as a way to understand how social, political and economic forces, react to the technology. The aim of the research is to understand the contrasts between technology and local forces, and the impact of globalization on technological advancement. The paper claims that, the Israeli case can be a model to understand changes in media policy elsewhere, and examine how countries can bridge the gap between technology and social development, including the reaction of traditional media and the political establishment to technology.

KEYWORDS: *Media Enjoys Freedom of Speech, Research Examines Changes in Media Policy, Impact of Globalization on Technological Advancement & Involves Security Issues*

Received: Aug 15, 2017; **Accepted:** Sep 03, 2017; **Published:** Sep 12, 2017; **Paper Id.:** IJCMSOCT20173

INTRODUCTION

The most distinctive aspect of the media in Israel is the supremacy of technology on the one hand, and the development under government supervision on the other (Reuben, 2014; Kaplan, 2015). Israel has a highly developed technology sector. The country is a leading community for startups, entrepreneurs, investors, venture capitalists, angels, developers, researchers and recruiters, and a world leader in terms of research and development spending, as a percentage of the economy. It has a highly developed technology sector, and produces more start-up companies than large, peaceful, and stable nations like Japan, China, India, Korea, Canada, and the United Kingdom. Israel has the highest density of tech startups in the world, and they attract more venture capital dollars per person, than any country - 2.5 times the U.S., 30 times Europe, 80 times India, and 300 times China. Israel has more companies in the tech-oriented NASDAQ, than any country outside the U.S., more than all of Europe, Japan, Korea, India, and China combined (Senor and Singer, 2009).

Israel is a high-tech country, where over the past decade, new media has largely expanded. It has today, one of the highest household broadband penetration rates in the world and nearly three quarters of the Jewish population, have access to the Internet and use it regularly (The Economist, 2010). However, the other side of the development of technology is limitations on the media. The Israeli media offers a diverse range of views. They are generally free from overt political interference and operate in an environment in which, press freedom is generally respected, although, what identify Israeli media most is, limitations on the coverage of security issues and public supervision over the broadcast media.

The research examines the impact of technology on social and media policy changes. Changes have been common in all countries, and created tensions between public service values and new technologies. Also, common to all countries is that, public service broadcasting institutions faced new opportunities for meeting their public commitments, and maintaining their relevance in national media systems (Bardoel & Leen d' Haenens, 2008). The tension between public service values and digital technologies shows the dilemma faced by public service broadcasters – attract large audiences, or represent an alternative to the commercial channels. As a fact, despite differing political philosophies, market forces became the primary determinant of market directions (Enily, 2008).

What makes Israeli media unique in that perspective is that, the influence of public authorities and public broadcasting is still particularly evident today (Klein Shagrir and Keinonen, 2016). The relationship between the media and the government has established the notion that, Israel's security issues stand at the heart of its very existence. The policy of the Israeli security system was traditionally based on the need to prevent advertisement of information on sensitive issues. The perspective of security stems, from a situation of prolonged war between Israel and Arab states and armed fanatic organizations, and the daily exposure to terrorist attacks against civilians. However, new technology and global media coverage enforce new standards, by ignoring the interests of the local media. The change in global media coverage of Israel's affairs, has been the result of new technology and social developments, creating a new reality of media dominance of global issues (Maoz, 2006; Peri, 2006).

The research also examines the role of the government in changes, in Israel's media landscape. A new media policy initiated a change from the traditional role of governments, as the main provider of information and a key player in protecting local culture, and local programming (Katz, 2000). The involvement of governments in the media is an issue, for debate around the world, as it has been the threat to local cultures from an increase in foreign programming (Steemers, 1999). Today, governments play an important role in the development of new media and the digital television landscape (Evans, Verdegem and De Marez, 2014). The same process developed in Israel, since, new media determined dramatic changes in the balance of social and political power (Kaplan, 2015). Media policy significantly transformed, from a long established and monopolistic system, to a more highly developed and sophisticated approach. A blend of old media and new media are distributed and technologies grew (Katz, 2009). Despite this, Israeli society is comprised of groups of people, with different and sometimes clashing values and worldviews, and policy makers must constantly take these various and vying opinions into account (Kaplan, 2015a). This structure resulted that, in media policy it remained a powerful political tool. Reactions led to debates on the culture of communications, but the trend is clear: a merging of the old model of public broadcasting, with the new model of commercialized broadcasting (Tucker, 2017).

Censorship on Security Issues

A critical contrast to technological advancement is a limitation on freedom of speech, applied to issues involving national security. Despite, the development under global influence, the laws on censorship are based on British emergency regulations, from 1945, before the establishment of Israel (Lebel, 2005). The perspective of security stems from a situation of prolonged war, between Israel and Arab states and armed fanatic organizations, and the exposure to terrorist attacks against civilians. For years, a wide national consent was created, beyond ideological and political stands, for the need to prevent advertisement that could endanger the national security (Kaplan, 2015). The country is unique in the need to balance between national security and media coverage, as national security and freedom of the press are two grand domains of its society. This situation requires limitations, on publication of information that relates to national security

affairs (Peoria, 2001).

The need to reconcile both free press and national security is a topic that has long occupied Israeli society, which has traditionally seen national security, as more important than the need for the public to be exposed to sensitive information. The policy of the Israeli security system was traditionally based on the need to prevent advertisement of information, on the army and sensitive issues (Sucharov, 2005). The most prominent effect of putting security first is that, the government has the power to censor what is considered a risk, for the State (Israel Ministry of Foreign affairs, 2013). According to the US Department of State report on Israel (2006), the law provides for freedom of speech and of the press, and the government generally respected these rights in practice, subject to restrictions concerning security issues. According to Freedom House (2017), Israel enjoys a lively, pluralistic media environment in which, press freedom is generally respected. However, due to ongoing conflicts with the Palestinians and neighboring countries, media outlets are subject to military censorship and journalists, often face travel restrictions.

This is where policy changes became apparent, causing dilemmas for the public, the media and policy-makers. The main conflicts are in public opinion, the position of the media, the role of the media, the relationship between the media and the government, and the role of the government.

One major conflict is, in public opinion, as the local concept is threatened by global media coverage of Israel's and Middle East affair. On the one hand, Israelis agree that, the news media are a major source of public information on political processes, and can be regarded as a crucial tool for mobilizing opinions, in political and social conflicts and disputes. On the other hand, in the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, news-reported information concerning security issues can influence the attitudes and assessments, of the parties concerned (Maoz 2006).

Another contrast is the position of the media debate, has focused on the imperative of providing full coverage of events, even during war times or other security threats, while not harming state security. The main dilemmas are, whether to publicize events that might elicit violence or weaken morale; the way of maintaining credibility despite security needs and censorship limitations; and how to properly balance between the public's right to know and the restrictions of censorship. On the one hand, journalists who bypass the censorship system on these sensitive issues could face criminal prosecution and jail time (McKernan, 2016). On the other hand, the Israeli media have their way to circumvent the censorship, and can quote information based on foreign news sources, which are not subject to the Israeli censorship (Surkes, 2016).

Another contrast is the role of the media. On the one hand, Israelis agree that, since the country faces security needs on a permanent basis, the media are expected to carry social responsibility duties, of not publishing information that is sensitive to national security. According to Tenenboim-Weinblatt (2008), the mainstream media, in tune with political elites and public opinion, largely support military goals. Beckerman (2005), found unequivocal support of the media, during security events. On the other hand, coverage of security matters by global media caused a change in the role of the media in society: while in the past, the army had sole authority to ban advertisement of information in different fields. Today, local media bear most of the weight of preserving a balance between the right of the public to know and the protection of state security and their role is to balance between local and global trends in the coverage of security matters.

Another contrast is the relationship between the media and the government. On one hand, as claimed by Liebes (2011), Israel's media and the influence of internal groups have totally changed, as cultural paternalism vanished and media

rules and regulations have totally changed. On the other hand, as claimed by Schejter (2009), the media operate within a closed and highly regulated regime that aims to fulfill cultural objectives, dictated by the dominant group and broadcast regulations are designed to mute certain groups, in order to prevent them from engaging in the cultural discourse, aimed at developing national culture.

Another contrast is in the role of the government. Whereas, in the past, Israeli authorities could prohibit publication of classified information for national security reasons, it was the availability of new technology and global media transmissions, which forced the government to permit publication of sensitive information. Today, security issues are being discussed by local media, with almost no limitations, including detailed descriptions of military operations and personal stories of soldiers, public discussion on security issues and peace negotiation, including criticism of government actions and plans, debates on security needs, publication of official reports and exposure of past events, with the inclusion of sensitive information on army operations – some of them subject to criticism and intense public debates. Foreign media reports serve as a catalyst in this process; they are not obliged to the limitations imposed by the military authorities (Katz, 2012).

Public Supervision

A dominant aspect of the development of the broadcast media is the requirements for educational and cultural programs. Israel is considered a country of immigrants, and radio and television were important means of creating an immigrant' society and social unity, as a part of a demographic structure of immigrant absorption, and a force which affected all groups in Israeli culture equally. To achieve these goals, public broadcasting was compelled to promise representation of all groups of the population — and to give true expression to a range of opinions, tastes, interests, traditions, preferences, beliefs, and local subcultures - including different regional representations, minorities, and languages (Katz, 2009). This structure still exists today, and even after the breakup of public service monopoly, media policy continues to enforce broadcasting of public programming and public supervision (Tucker, 2017). The foundations of public broadcasting still exist, since all of the channels are under public supervision. The formula of combining cultures was adopted in commercial policy, with the channels operated by private companies, are under the supervision of public authorities that apply strict regulations, regarding original production aimed at bringing together the various ethnic, cultural, and ideological groups, around a collective experience (Liebes, 2006).

For decades, Israel's broadcasting system was an instrument of social and cultural integration, for a multi-cultural society (Kaplan, 2015a), and today, it is still primarily public or under public supervision. Although, the development of new media demonstrated transition from public to commercial broadcasting and from locally focused policy, to a multi-channel structure, Israel adopted a mixed model of public broadcasting and a free market approach. As a result of this policy, broadcasting is broken down into two types: public and commercial, and all broadcasting services operate under public supervision. Commercial broadcasting must dedicate 50% of the programs, to local content like drama, documentary and movies, for the protection of local culture. Cable and satellite are also privately-operated, but all channels, including foreign channels transmitting in Hebrew, or even Hebrew subtitles, are required for a quota of local programming. According to the Ministry of Communications, the development of the local production industry has the capability to broaden the array of possibilities, to express the multitude of tastes and opinions, within the Israeli public, enrich Israeli culture, enable varied representations of current issues and strengthen the grasp of the Hebrew language.

The outcome of the contrasts between advanced technology and public supervision is that, the new structure still

offers a combined approach, where, alongside each other, there are public and privately-financed services. Despite, the will of the government to keep the power of public broadcasting in its hands, the addition of commercial and multi-channel services, was a result of the changes in the political and public atmosphere. This is where, policy changes became apparent, causing changes in the structure and role of all broadcast media sectors.

Radio has mixed structure, as public services carry advertising and private services are under public supervision. The main radio service is Kan Israel, which has a monopoly on national radio broadcasts. It operates eight radio stations, ranging from light entertainment and popular music to classical music, news and culture. This is a public service, which carries commercial advertising. The two stations operated by the Army broadcast to the general public. These are public services, which are financed partly through non-commercial advertising, in the form of public-service announcements. The third service is regional radio stations, which are operated by private franchises, through commercial financing under public supervision (Gilboa, 2008).

Changes are apparent in public broadcasting. The main public service, Channel 1, is operated by the Israel Public Service Organization (Kan) and divided into two departments: the News Department and the Cultural Department, which creates fictional, non-fictional and educational programs. In May 2017, Kan replaced the Israel Broadcasting Authority (IBA), which was for 49 years the country's public broadcasting service. The Knesset, Israel's parliament, decided to close down the IBA on grounds that it was too bureaucratic and expensive.

Changes are apparent in commercial broadcasting too. For 24 years the main commercial service - Channel 2 - was split between three and then two broadcasters, which operated three or four days a week and switched every two years. It was split into two different channels in November 2017. Another commercial service, Channel 10, was introduced in 2002, followed by four commercial designated channels, which serve specific segments of the Israeli society. The channels include a Russian-speaking channel (in 2002), a channel of Israeli popular music (in 2003), an Israeli tradition channel (in 2011) and an Arabic-speaking channel (first in 2010 and then in 2012). These channels are available on cable and satellite. They are financed through commercial advertising and operate under the supervision

Changes are also apparent in the multi-channel sector, as new media have largely expanded and a diverse selection of broadcast media is available. Most Israelis subscribe to cable, satellite or digital terrestrial television. Cable services started in 1991, and direct broadcast satellite began in the summer of 2000. It proved to be a strong competitor for cable television. This led the formerly three national cable companies, to merge in 2003. Digital terrestrial television (DTT) was launched in 2009, offering six national stations and plans are to increase the service to 18 channels. Two mobile companies have recently started to provide competing services of multichannel television, over the internet. Cell com TV was launched in early 2015 and Partner began providing television services in August 2017. Although, their packages are not as comprehensive as those of cable and satellite, they fulfill the needs of a certain market segments, interested in receiving basic TV channels and VOD at lower prices.

A major contrast between technology and public supervision is a different policy for each sector, as supervision is split among different regulatory authorities. Public broadcasting is supervised by the government, commercial services operate under the supervision of the Second Authority, for Television and Radio, and multi-channel services are supervised by the Council for Cable and Satellite Broadcasting.

Under this structure, there are services which fall in-between regulatory authorities. According to the Ministry of

Communications, the Second Authority is a public authority that regulates commercial broadcasting, promotes original productions, protects against the offense of the public interest, encourages the incorporation of public interest contents and initiates studies on the social effects of broadcasts. It regulates commercial television and regional radio stations – but, also the multi-channel service of IDAN+ digital terrestrial transmissions, which offers Israel's free-to-air television channels. The Cable and Satellite Council is a public authority whose fundamental work is, according to the Ministry of Communications, to represent, protect and promote the public interests in the field of cable and satellite and multi-channel television. However, while cable and satellite are not allowed to carry commercial advertising, the Council also supervises designated channels, which are commercial and available on cable and satellite. This structure lives Internet services out of the supervision of any authority, and thus the multi-channel services of the mobile companies, transmitted via the Internet, are not obligated to transmit local cultural programs.

CONCLUSIONS

The research examines the changing role of the media in Israel. In order to understand the changes in the media landscape, it is important to examine the way technology influenced society. These changes include changes in the role of the government, social changes, changes in media policy and a debate over the issue of censorship on security issues. As determined, a new policy was adopted not by the will of the government, but through the supremacy of new technology. It seems that in the conflict between the government and the media, the breaking down of barriers of information favored a compromised structure, both in censorship on security issues and public supervision.

In censorship, the Israeli society has traditionally seen national security as more important than the need of the public to be exposed to sensitive information, and it is commonly agreed that although Israel is a democratic state where freedom of speech and freedom of the press are cornerstones of its existence, in all that relates to security things should be different. But, the availability of new media proved to be more powerful than military limitations. The inability to prevent information from being published means that global media coverage can be designated as an important catalyst in the change of attitude by Israeli authorities and the public. This demonstrates that despite domestic needs of national security, Israel's policy-making can be no different than other countries where freedom of the press exists, despite its unique needs of national security.

In public supervision, changes in Israel's media policy have been part of a global trend which led to a growing recognition of the need for wider regulatory changes. The regulatory responses to both global and local forces endorsed a new policy, diminishing the role of the government and reducing the rules that limit market competition. A mixed model of public and commercial services developed, although all broadcast services remain under public supervision. The public service principles that identified Israeli media policy for many years are still dominant, despite the adoption of technological advancement and new policy objectives.

According to the Israeli Ministry of Foreign Affairs (2013), there is a direct connection between security censorship and government control of the media. As they explain, Israel has a constant state of instability because since the establishment is in a constant state of war and wars shape the form and nature of a community. The threat that Israel has always faced affects the structure of society and it determines the way society allocates resources. Resources in Israel will always be allocated to security before everything else. The most prominent effect of putting security before everything is that the government has the power to control everything and has the power to censor what is considered to be a risk for the

State. However, as they explain, this is the reason why the media are limited and monopolizes.

This can explain the contrasts in Israel's media policy. We can consider globalization as a pro-competitive policy and as a threat to local monopolies, although what best identifies Israeli media is that they are organized under public supervision, although this includes not simply the extensive impact of the government, but also split supervision between various regulatory agencies, which cause an obstacle to policy changes and de-regulation.

REFERENCES

1. Bahar, D. (2016, May 4). *Delivering on economic prosperity in Israel: How monopolies are hampering the startup nation*. Brookings. <https://www.brookings.edu/blog/markaz/2016/05/04/delivering-on-economic-prosperity-in-israel-how-monopolies-are-hampering-the-start-up-nation/>
2. Bardoel, J. & d'Haenens, L. *Reinventing Public Service Broadcasting in Europe - Prospects, Promises and Problems*. Media, Culture and Society, SAGE Publications, 2008, 30 (3), p.337-355. <https://publicmediaalliance.org/reports/reinventing-public-service-broadcasting-europe/>
3. Beckerman, G. (2005). *Disengaged*. Columbia Journalism Review. 44(3)
4. Bureau of Democracy, Human Rights, and Labor (March 8, 2006). "Israel and the occupied territories". *Country Reports on Human Rights Practices – 2005*. U.S. Department of State. <https://www.state.gov/j/drl/rls/hrrpt/2002/18278.htm>
5. Economist, T. (December 29, 2010). *Beyond the start-up nation*. http://www.economist.com/node/17796932?story_id=17796932
6. Enli, G.S., *Redefining Public Service Broadcasting: Multi-Platform Participation*. *Convergence: The International Journal of Research into New Media Technologies*. Vol 14, Issue 1, 2008. <http://journals.sagepub.com/doi/abs/10.1177/1354856507084422>
7. Evans, T., Verdegem, P., and De Marez, L. *Balancing Public and Private Value for the Digital Television Era*. *Journal of the European Institute for Communication and Culture*, Volume 17, 2010 - Issue 1, pages 37-54. <http://nca.tandfonline.com/doi/abs/10.1080/13183222.2010.11009025>
8. Freedom House, March 21, 2017. <https://freedomhouse.org/report/freedom-press/2016/israel>
9. Gilboa, E. 2008. *The Evolution of Israeli Media*. *Middle East Review of International Affairs*, 12, 3, (September), 88-101. <http://www.rubincenter.org/meria/2008/09/gilboa.pdf>
10. Israel Ministry of Foreign Affairs, 2013. *Israel – The World's Innovation Manual*. <http://mfa.gov.il/MFA/InnovativeIsrael/ScienceTech/Pages/Israel-World-Innovation-Nation.aspx>
11. Kaplan, J. (April 20, 2015). *Introduction: The Diversity of Israeli Society*. The Jewish Agency. <http://www.jewishagency.org/society-and-politics/content/36171>
12. Kaplan, J. (April 27, 2015a). *Ethnicity and the Socioeconomic Gap in Israel*. The Jewish Agency. <http://www.jewishagency.org/society-and-politics/content/36576/>
13. Katz, Y., "The Diminishing Role of Governments in the Development of Cable TV", *European Journal of Political Research*, Volume 36, No. 2, December 2000, pages 285-302
14. <https://air.unimi.it/retrieve/handle/2434/206859/238598/No.5%20Journalism%20and%20Mass%20Communication.pdf>
15. Katz, Y. (2009), *Protecting Local Culture in a Global Environment: The Case of Israel's Broadcast Media*. *International Journal of Communication*, 3, 1-20. <http://ijoc.org/index.php/ijoc/article/view/389>

16. Katz, Y., "Examining the IDF Media Campaign on the Unilateral Disengagement Plan of Israel from Gaza Strip", *GMI: Mediterranean Edition*, Spring 2012. Volume 7, issue 1
http://globalmedia.emu.edu.tr/images/stories/ALL_ARTICLES/2012/Spring/2_Yaron_Katz.pdf
17. Klein Shagrir, O., and Keinonen, H. Public Service Television in a Multi-Platform Environment: A Comparative Study in Finland and Israel. *Journal of European Television History*, Vol 5, No 10, 2016. <http://rdbg.tuic.nl/euscreen-ojs/index.php/view/article/view/JETHC066>
18. Lebel, U. (2005). *Communicating Security*. Beer Shiva. Ben Gurion Institute for Israeli Studies.
19. Levy, G. (May 11, 2014). "Freedom of the press, at any price". *Haaretz*. <http://www.haaretz.com/opinion/.premium-1.589888>
20. Liebes, Tamar, book review on Schejter, Amit. M, *Muting Israeli Democracy: How Media and Cultural Policy Undermine Free Expression*, in: *European Journal of Communication* 2011 26: 267-269
21. Maoz, I. (2006). *The Effect of News Coverage Concerning the Opponents' Reaction to a Concession on Its Evaluation in the Israeli-Palestinian Conflict*. In: *The Harvard International Journal of Press/Politics*. 11 (70).
22. McKernan, B. (2016). Israel 'silencing' Palestinian journalists in 'incitement' offences crack down, monitors say. <http://www.independent.co.uk/news/world/middle-east/israel-palestine-journalist-arrests-incitement-law-facebook-a7354236.html>
23. Peri, Y. (2001) 'Civil-Military Relations in Israel in Crisis', in D. Maman and E. Ben-Ari (Eds) *Military, State, and Society in Israel: Theoretical and Comparative Perspectives*, pp. 107-36. Edison, NJ: Transaction Publishers
24. Peri, Y. (2006). *Generals in the Cabinet room: How the Military shapes Israeli policy*, Washington, DC., United States Institute of Peace Press
25. Reuben, R. S. C. (August 26, 2014). *Imagine a world without Israel - part 2*. *Huffington Post*. http://www.huffingtonpost.com/rabbi-steven-carr-reuben-phd/imagine-a-world-without-i_1_b_5706935.html
26. Senor and Singer (2009), *Start-up Nation: The Story of Israel's Economic Miracle*, HACHETTE GROUP US
27. Schejter, M.A. *Muting Israeli democracy: How media and cultural policy undermine free expression*. Urbana and Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 2009, 216 pages.
28. <http://www.press.uillinois.edu/books/catalog/69tfg6mg9780252034589.html>
29. Steemers, L. *The Problem of Redefining Public Service Broadcasting in the Digital Age. Convergence: The International Journal of Research into New Media Technologies*, Vol 5, Issue 3, 1999. <http://journals.sagepub.com/doi/abs/10.1177/135485659900500305>
30. Sucharov, M. (2005). *Security Ethics and the Modern Military: the Case of Israel Defense Forces*. *Armed Forces & Society*. 31 (2). 169-199.
31. Surkes, S. (2016). *The military censor seeks control over blogs, Facebook posts*. <http://www.timesofisrael.com/military-censor-seeks-control-over-blogs-facebook-posts/>
32. Tenenboim-Weinblatt, K. (2008). *We will get through this together': journalism, trauma and the Israeli disengagement from the Gaza Strip*. *Media, Culture Society* 30 (495)
33. Tucker, N. (May 10, 2017). *After 49 Years, This Is How Israel's Government Shut Down Its Public Broadcaster With Hours' Notice*. *The Associated Press*. www.haaretz.com/israel-news/1.788280